



March 28, 2006

# Press Release

## **ICE arrests 14 charged with Operating an unlicensed money remitting business and extortionate loan scheme**

*More than \$5 million smuggled to Yemen*

An indictment was unsealed today in U.S. District Court in Brooklyn charging 14 defendants with operating an unlicensed money remitting business that smuggled over \$5 million to Yemen, and a scheme to collect extensions of credit using extortionate means targeting members of the Yemeni expatriate community residing in the greater New York City area.

The indictment and arrests were announced by **ROSLYNN R. MAUSKOPF**, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York and **MARTIN D. FICKE**, the Department of Homeland Security's Special Agent-in-Charge of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in New York (ICE) and is the culmination of a three-year investigation that included approximately 180 days of court-authorized wire-tapping of four of the defendants' telephones.

In the first scheme, NEIL KRAMER, ISADORE USEROWITZ, HAROLD WEISBERG, HAMAD ALI, SADEK MAHDI, HAMOOD ZOKARI, NAGEEB ALDAYLAM and MOHSEN HUDYIH are charged with operating an unlicensed money transmitting business. ALDAYLAM, ALI, MAHDI and ZOKARI, Yemeni expatriates, collected money from other Yemeni expatriates for shipment to known money-remitters in Yemen. These four defendants gave the cash to NEIL KRAMER and MICHAEL WEISBERG, attorneys licensed to practice law in New York, and ISADORE USEROWITZ, a real estate broker, who drew down checks in corresponding amounts from their professional checking accounts.

ALDAYLAM, ALI, MAHDI and ZOKARI, with the assistance of MOHAMMED ALGAHIM, HAMOOD ALHUDAIS, SALEM AL-MERDAI, ABDO ALWASIA, MOHSEN HUDYIH and FATEH AGI SALEH, then arranged for couriers traveling to Yemen to smuggle the checks out of the United States, without filing the currency transaction reports with the United States government as required by law. In this manner, between March 2003 through July 2005, the defendants smuggled approximately \$5,053,965 to Yemen.

In the second scheme, which operated during the same time period, KRAMER, ALI, MAHDI, ZOKARI and ABDULLAH ALHABABI are charged with using extortionate means to collect extensions of credit. ALI, MAHDI, ZOKARI and ALHABABI introduced Yemeni expatriates in need of cash to NEIL KRAMER, who provided the loans ranging in amounts from \$5,000 to

\$100,000. In return, the borrowers were required to sign “confessions of judgments,” which left blank the amount of the loan, the terms of the loan, and the due date – all to be filled in at a later time by the defendants. In some instances, the debtors were required to surrender the leases to their businesses, as well as their travel documents, such as Immigration and Naturalization Service Permanent Resident Alien Cards (“green cards”) and passports, until their debts were paid in full.

On March 27, 2006, federal agents executed a search warrant at the residence of NEIL KRAMER and seized \$67,000 in cash, numerous identity and travel documents withheld from debtors, and a phony New York City Marshal’s stamp. Earlier today, federal agents searched a safe deposit box belonging to KRAMER and seized approximately \$500,000 in cash.

“The government’s ability to track the flow of money into and out of the United States is vital to our national security,” said **MAUSKOPF**. “This case is particularly troubling because it involves attorneys who violated their oaths and positions of trust for their own financial gain.”

“The illicit flow of more than \$5 million out of the United States to Yemen identifies a serious vulnerability exploited by criminal elements motivated by profit and greed,” said Ficke. “One of our primary tasks at ICE is to identify such vulnerabilities and close them to criminals and others who seek to raise illicit funds.”

ICE agents worked in conjunction with the Department of Homeland Security’s Customs & Border Protection (CBP) officers at JFK International Airport. Customs officers alerted ICE agents to the presence of outbound monetary instruments that seemed suspect.

“These arrests highlight the outstanding cooperation between ICE and CBP officers in initiating and developing money laundering cases,” said Camille Polimeni, Area Director for CBP at JFK Airport.

Also involved in the investigation were the Port Authority Police Department of New York and New Jersey, the City of Newburgh Police Department, the United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Inspector General, The Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Queens County District Attorney’s Office

If convicted of using extortionate means to collect extensions of credit, each defendant faces a maximum sentence of 20 years incarceration and a fine of \$250,000. If convicted of evading the international monetary shipment reporting requirement, each defendant faces a maximum sentence of 10 years incarceration and a fine equal to twice the amount smuggled. If convicted of operating an unlicensed money transmitting business, each defendant faces a maximum sentence of five years incarceration and a fine of \$250,000. In addition, the indictment seeks forfeiture judgment against the defendants in the amount of \$7 million dollars.

The case has been assigned to United States District Judge Eric N. Vitaliano.

The government’s case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Lawrence P. Ferazani, Jr. and Brendan King.

### **The Defendants:**

Neil S. Kramer

DOB: 4/13/1938

Isadore A. Userowitz, also known as “Arthur Userowitz”  
DOB: 6/24/1924

Harold Weisberg  
DOB: 2/13/1938

Hamad Ali, also known as “Ahmed Jeran”  
DOB: 12/28/1952

Sadek Mahdi (recently deceased)  
DOB: 2/6/1964

Hamood Zokari  
DOB: 5/1/1952

Nageeb Aldaylam  
DOB: 9/9/1968

Mohammed Algahim, also known as “Mohamed Kaid”  
DOB: 12/28/1973

Abdullah Alhababi  
DOB: 1/1/1964

Hamood Alhudais  
DOB: 11/5/1961

Salem Al-Merdai  
DOB: 8/12/1959

Abdo Alwasia (fugitive)  
DOB: 9/11/1950

Mohsen Hudiyih  
DOB: 2/15/1956

Fateh Nagi Saleh  
DOB: 4/20/1972

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*